



PHYSICS DEPARTMENT DEVELOPS NEW 'RING THEORY'

BY PAT KETCHUM

MARRIED COUPLES ARE A DISTINCT RARITY when it comes to faculty hires for a particular academic department. Yet two husband-and-wife teams are among the seven new tenure-track physicists on campus this fall.

More than a statistical anomaly, the couples represent the Physics Department's elegant solution to the "two-body" or "trailing-spouse" problem, says Phil Bailey, dean of the College of Science and Mathematics. Well-known terms in academe, they refer to the dilemma faced by couples when one receives a

More than one opening in the Physics Department was the magnetic force for Kat and Glen Gillen. The couple applied at the same time, then waited for separate job offers before packing their bags in Ohio and moving to Los Osos.

The Statistics Department knows firsthand about the challenges posed by the two-body problem. This year, six faculty candidates rejected employment offers in Statistics. One reason: Spouses or mates of prospective hires couldn't find "gainful employment."

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job offer but the other is unable to find suitable work nearby.

In general, the high cost of living and distance from a metro area's job opportunities can put Cal Poly at a disadvantage in attracting highly qualified faculty. The problem is compounded when both spouses work, as is increasingly the case nationwide.

Jennifer Klay and Tom Gutierrez are among this year's new physicists. The couple left Berkeley for Cal Poly this summer – a move that would have been impossible had the Physics Department not offered them both jobs. "We simply wouldn't have been able to come," says Klay.

By hiring couples, the campus is in effect creating a double advantage from the two-body problem, according to Mike Suess, associate vice president of academic personnel.

"We must also be cognizant of our commitment to equal opportunity," he says. "The tenured faculty members of hiring departments have to endorse the appointment of new faculty, so it's not automatic."

Attitudes and rules about faculty couples have changed over the years. When Dean Phil Bailey arrived at Cal Poly 38 years ago, campus policies prevented his wife, Christina, from teaching on campus. Now, she's the chair of the Chemistry and Biochemistry Department, and the Baileys are one of many faculty couples. In fact, more than eight tenure-track faculty couples are employed in the college, and more than a dozen other tenure-track faculty have spouses in full-time staff or part-time faculty positions around campus.

The hiring of two married couples in a single recruitment is unique for any department, but it's especially noteworthy in Physics, given a recent study by the U.S. Department of Energy, which operates the nation's national laboratories and nuclear weapons complex.

The report urges universities and national laboratories to capitalize on two-body opportunities. It appears Cal Poly has done just that. □